

Study Habits of Students at a Two-Year Tertiary Institution

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Abstract

Understanding our students' study habits can contribute to how we teach, what we teach and what we designate as home learning. Little research appears to exist on Japanese university students' study habits and it is through this study that the researcher presents her findings regarding the study habits of students at an all-female two-year junior college. These results show the data collected from 104 first and second year students who participated in an anonymous questionnaire. Armed with this knowledge it is hoped that students may reflect on their study habits and teachers may be better equipped to teach them.

English is a compulsory subject for all Japanese students hoping to progress to tertiary education, and many students have admitted that their only ambition in their English studies is to pass university entrance exams (LoCastro, 1996). Everyone in Japan is aware of the lengths that high school students go to pass entrance exams; long hours at *juku* or “cram school” as they make their way through *jukken* or “examination hell”. This is the last year of high school where all the time and energy of students is devoted to study, with the one goal of passing the exam to enter university (Berwick & Ross, 1989; Rubrecht, 2004).

However, there appears to be very limited research relating to these students' study habits once they progress to university after achieving that goal. The loss of goals is often accompanied by a loss of motivation, which is further exacerbated by the fact that some students have been unable to enter the school of their choice and have often found themselves studying at another institution in a major that they are not particularly interested in (Berwick & Ross, 1989).

This study hopes to address a gap in the literature as it investigates the study habits of students at a two-year junior college, and how they change when students move from high school to university. A better understanding of tertiary students' study habits is beneficial for both the students themselves and their instructors. Using the data collected, it is hoped that teachers will not only be better able to plan their activities, lessons and assign homework, but also that it will help students to set and achieve new goals and persevere with their English study (Rubrecht, 2004).

The Study

The study was carried out to ascertain the time management, study patterns and skills of first and second

year English Communication students at an all-women's two-year tertiary institute in central Japan.

Methods

With the cooperation of numerous teachers, both first and second year students were given an anonymous multiple-choice questionnaire asking about their study habits. They were given five-minutes in class to fill-in the questionnaire on Google Docs using their smartphones. To avoid any confusion or misunderstanding the questionnaire was administered in the students' native language of Japanese. Previous to conducting the questionnaire the students' possession of smartphones was confirmed.

Participation in the questionnaire was voluntary and data was collected in the spring semester of 2017. A total of 104 students responded to the twenty-three-item questionnaire; 66 first years and 38 second years. The questionnaire asked students how they saw themselves as learners, their learning and study methods, when and for how long they studied both before and after entering tertiary education, and the support they received (Appendices A & B).

Note that all raw data in the tables has been rounded to one decimal place, so some percentage data may not sum to 100%.

Results and Discussion

The questionnaire

The twenty-three-item questionnaire was based on a previous questionnaire by O'Dowd (2010), supplemented by a number of original questions by the researcher (Appendices A & B). All sections except for section 10 asked for students to give their answers from the options provided. In section 10 they were asked to rate their opinion on a Likert-type scale. To avoid neutral responses and collect more precise data, four points rather than five were used; strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree (Edwards & Smith, 2014).

Participants

The participants were first and second year English Communication majors from a two-year college in central Japan. All were female and even though a few were of Korean, Filipino, Pakistani and Turkish nationality either their native language was Japanese, or they had native-like competence of the language. Of the total respondents first years consisted of 63.5% and second years 36.5%.

Results revealed that the majority of participants saw themselves as average learners with 62.1% of first years and 52.6% of second years choosing the statement, *I'm an average learner*. Only 6.1% and 2.6% respectively saw themselves as *very good learners*.

Table 1. Self-Image of Learning Ability

Response	1st years		2nd years	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
I'm not good at learning new things	9	13.6%	5	13.2%
I'm an average learner	41	62.1%	20	52.6%
I'm a good learner, I like to learn	12	18.2%	12	31.6%
I'm a very good learner, I love to learn	4	6.1%	1	2.6%

n = 66:38

As this questionnaire was administered before the end of the semester and therefore before grades were given, it can only be assumed that the first years' responses were based on their high school grades. Despite this, there was no difference between first and second year student responses. Over half the respondents reported getting mostly B's (53.0% and 52.6% respectively).

Table 2. Grades

Response	1st years		2nd years	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Mostly A's	5	7.6%	6	15.8%
A's and B's	15	22.7%	7	18.4%
Mostly B's	35	53.0%	20	52.6%
B's and C's	6	9.1%	3	7.9%
Mostly C's	1	1.5%	1	2.6%
C's and below	1	1.5%	0	0.0%
No response	3	4.5%	1	2.6%

n = 66:38

As expected from English Communication majors *better at English* was the most popular choice across both first and second years when asked *are you better or worse at studying English than other subjects?* The researcher was somewhat surprised that the students made any other responses, particularly with the thirteen respondents who said that they were *better at other subjects*. Why these students had chosen to major in English is questionable and is an area for further investigation.

Table 3. English as a Subject

Response	1st years		2nd years	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Better at English	40	60.6%	23	60.5%
Better at other subjects	6	9.1%	7	18.4%
About the same	20	30.3%	8	21.1%

n = 66:38

The top three methods for study chosen were *study during class* (77.3% to 68.4%), *listening to foreign*

music (71.2% to 78.9%), and *doing assigned homework* (59.1% to 60.5%). The three most unpopular learning and studying methods were *reading English magazines or newspapers* (1.5% to 0.0%), *listening to study CD's* (16.7% 13.2%) and *listening to the radio* (12.1% to 13.2%).

Furthermore, results showed that more than 90% of students (93.9% first years and 92.1% second years) expressed a desire for their teachers to help them to improve their study skills. The literature has often stressed the importance of the ability of teachers in the EFL classroom to identify their students' learning styles, and that they should be well prepared to aid them in this area (Hyland, Mochizuki, 1999; Oxford et al, 1992).

Table 4. Learning Methods

Response	1st years		2nd years	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Study during class	51	77.3%	26	68.4%
Reading the textbook	29	43.9%	17	44.7%
Revision by myself	21	31.8%	5	13.2%
Notetaking	31	47.0%	11	28.9%
DVDs and movies	28	42.4%	20	52.6%
Talking to the teacher	18	27.2%	9	23.7%
Cramming	19	28.8%	8	21.1%
Listening to the radio	8	12.1%	5	13.2%
Listening to foreign music	47	71.2%	30	78.9%
Writing letters or email	14	21.2%	7	18.4%
Memorization	37	56.1%	15	39.5%
Reading foreign books	24	36.4%	10	26.3%
Doing assigned homework	39	59.1%	23	60.5%
Checking dictionaries	38	57.6%	18	47.4%
Doing extra homework	16	24.2%	6	15.8%
Studying in the library	14	21.2%	10	26.3%
Practice speaking skills	21	31.8%	4	10.5%
Asking the teacher questions	10	15.2%	7	18.4%
Reading English newspapers/magazines	1	1.5%	0	0.0%
Watching English TV programmes	13	19.7%	8	21.1%
Surfing the Internet	12	18.2%	8	21.1%
Listening to study CDs	11	16.7%	5	13.2%
Do practice tests	22	33.3%	4	10.5%

n = 66:38. As participants could choose more than one answer the total does not add to 100%.

Overwhelmingly, the most common time for students to study was *in the train/bus to and from school* (80.3% first years and 63.2% second years). This response challenges teachers to provide homework activities that can be done whilst students are on the move. The second response chosen was *very late at night* (48.5% first years and 57.9% second years) which the researcher suspects is generally after the students have finished their part time jobs or been socializing.

Why students either choose to or perhaps have to study at this time due to other commitments like part time jobs, is another area which requires further enquiry. Another popular time for study was *at home after dinner* which showed 54.5% for first years and 55.3% for second years respectively. This is in line with research conducted among other types of university students (O'Dowd, 2010).

Table 5. Time of Day for Study

Response	1st years		2nd years	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Early morning	8	12.1%	2	5.3%
Lunchtime at school	4	6.1%	3	7.9%
At home before dinner	23	34.8%	11	28.9%
After watching TV	13	19.7%	9	23.7%
Only at school after class	15	22.7%	15	39.5%
At school in between classes	5	7.6%	5	13.2%
At home after dinner	36	54.5%	21	55.3%
Very late at night	32	48.5%	22	57.9%
In the train/bus to and from school	53	80.3%	24	63.2%
Other: After school at a café etc.	1	1.5%	0	0.0%

n = 66:38. As participants could choose more than one answer the total does not add to 100%.

When students were asked about their daily study before university matriculation as opposed to the time spent on daily study now, there was a significant decrease in the hours spent studying. Fifty-five percent of the participant's reported that their study time had decreased since entering higher education. Data showed that one first year participant went from studying for more than five hours a day to only studying before exams! This decrease in study time may highlight a lack of motivation that many students may feel after entering university. This is likely to be impacted by the fact that English Communication majors often have no career goal in mind after graduation, and many of them will not begin thinking about or looking for a job until their second year (Berwick & Ross, 1989; O'Dowd, 2010).

Table 6. Daily Study for the University Entrance Examination

Response	1st years		2nd years	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than one hour	20	30.3%	14	36.8%
1 to 2 hours	26	39.4%	15	39.5%
3 to 4 hours	12	18.2%	5	13.2%
More than 5 hours	5	7.6%	0	0.0%
Other:				
No study	0	0.0%	3	7.9%
Only for the interview	1	1.5%	0	0.0%
No response	2	3.0%	1	2.6%

n = 66:38

A further 18.2% reported an increase in study time, while 24.0% said that there was no change from high school. Due to lack of or missed responses 2.9% remained unconfirmed.

Table 7. Current Daily Study

Response	1st years		2nd years	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Less than one hour	25	37.9%	25	65.8%
1 to 2 hours	33	50.0%	7	18.4%
3 to 4 hours	2	3.0%	1	2.6%
Other: I only study before exams	6	9.1%	5	13.2%

n = 66:38

When participants were asked *whether they were able to study for at least half an hour without getting up, having a snack, watching TV or touching their phone* the majority of responses indicated either *always* (36.4% first years and 10.5% second years) and *generally* (43.9% first years and 65.8% second years).

Table 8. Able to Study Without Distractions

Response	1st years		2nd years	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Always	24	36.4%	4	10.5%
Generally	29	43.9%	25	65.8%
Hardly ever	9	13.6%	8	21.1%
Never	4	6.1%	1	2.6%

n = 66:38

Participants were also asked *do you preview/review for class every day* and the majority of students answered *hardly ever* (66.7% first years and 68.4% second years). As results showed that many students studied by doing assigned homework it would be beneficial for teachers to consider assigning a revision and previewing activity as homework, so students are more likely to come to class prepared.

Table 9. Preview and Review for Classes

Response	1st years		2nd years	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Always	3	4.5%	1	2.6%
Generally	13	19.7%	3	7.9%
Hardly ever	44	66.7%	26	68.4%
Never	6	9.1%	8	21.1%

n = 66:38

The participants were also asked about study conditions and whether they had a *comfortable and quiet place to study*. The majority of students responded *yes* (81.8% first years and 94.7% second years) however, a significant number of respondents answered no, 18.2% and 5.3% respectively.

Students also reported preferring to study alone rather than with a friend or with friends at 89.4% and 84.2% respectively. Over 90% of first years agreed with the statement *I study better alone* while 81.6% of second years *agreed*. When given the statement *I study better in groups* 54.5% of first years and 63.2% of second years *disagreed*. Seventy-five point eight percent of first years and 60.5% of second years *agreed* with the statement *I do better in my classes when I work in groups*. This was further confirmed with 56.0% of first years and 57.9% of second years *disagreeing* with the statement *I do better in my classes when I work alone*. This is consistent with research that shows Japanese students prefer to work in groups or pairs for communicative classes (Abe, 2013).

The researcher also enquired into the exam practices of the students asking them *do you start studying for exams at least three days beforehand?* Results for this question differed significantly between the first and second year college students. Forty-five percent of first years answered *always* while only 16% of second years answered the same. Most second years answered *hardly ever* at 44.7% while this comprised only 13.6% of first years.

Table 10. Exams and Study

Response	1st years		2nd years	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Always	30	45.5%	6	15.8%
Generally	23	34.8%	12	31.6%
Hardly ever	9	13.6%	17	44.7%
Never	4	6.1%	3	7.9%

n = 66:38

When participants were asked *can you finish your exams at school within the time given?* more than half of both first and second years said *always*, 51.5% and 57.9% respectively. There were no responses for *hardly ever* and *never*.

Table 11. Exam Completion

Response	1st years		2nd years	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Always	34	51.5%	22	57.9%
Generally	31	47.0%	16	42.1%
Hardly ever	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Never	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
No response	1	1.5%	0	0.0%

When the students were asked whether their family provided *financial support* for their studies the majority of students across both years answered either *always* or *generally* (56.1% and 47.2% respectively, and 33.3% and 36.8% respectively) with the remainder of participants receiving little or no support. The researcher believes that institutions need to consider how they can help these students who have not only a heavy study load, but who also have significant financial commitments or large student loans.

Table 12. Family Financial Support

Response	1st years		2nd years	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Always	37	56.1%	18	47.4%
Generally	22	33.3%	14	36.8%
Hardly Ever	6	9.1%	4	10.5%
Never	1	1.5%	2	5.3%

n = 66:38

The researcher also investigated what emotional support the students received from their family. Most participants replied *my family gives me emotional support for my studies always* (36.4% first years and 28.9% second years) or *generally* (37.9% and 44.7% respectively). Eight participants or 7.7% across both years reported having both financial and emotional support for their studies *hardly ever* and *never*.

Table 13. Family Emotional Support

Response	1st years		2nd years	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Always	24	36.4%	11	28.9%
Generally	25	37.9%	17	44.7%
Hardly Ever	12	18.2%	6	15.8%
Never	5	7.6%	4	10.5%

n = 66:38

When the participants were asked whether they use their smartphones for their language study, 96.0% of first years and 100.0% of second years responded that they did. The majority of the participants reported to *like* or *love* using their smartphones for study, however, 24.2% and 21.0% respectively said that they *did not like it*. The effectiveness of using smartphones in the ESL classroom has shown mixed results, however, it is clear that most students enjoy using them as a study tool (Wu, 2014).

Table 14. Smartphone Study

Response	1st years		2nd years	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Love it!	7	10.6%	5	13.2%
Like it	40	60.6%	25	65.8%
Don't like it	16	24.2%	8	21.0%
Hate it!	1	1.5%	0	0.0%
No response	2	3.0%	0	0.0%

n = 66:38

Conclusion

This research has aimed to bring to light the study habits of students at a two-year tertiary institution. The most dramatic change was in relation to the declining study hours for students before and after university matriculation. The results also highlighted the degree of popularity across a range of student learning methods. With this knowledge teachers should be able to better address their students' language study needs and equip themselves with the tools for more effective teaching.

To engage with students in the most effective way, teachers should consider targeting their lessons and homework towards the methods which are most popular with students. This could include selecting suitable English lyric music, focusing on appropriate lesson content, and setting related homework assignments. Clearly the old methods such as language CD's and the radio are not working as well as they did, as students use of media has evolved. Teachers need to be aware of that and adapt their techniques accordingly. The researcher believes that teaching methods are lagging behind students' learning preferences, as students adapt more readily to new technology.

Teachers should also work with students to identify how each individual learns, as this will vary across a class. As much as time allows, homework should be set to align with students' study methods.

The adaptability of students is most obvious when looking at the places and times they study. Travel time is being used more and more, as students become increasingly time poor, and this is supported by the findings regarding the use of smartphones for study. Universities need to move rapidly in this space to ensure that students are provided with the sort of study material and assignments that lend themselves to these new study methods.

The decline in time spent studying after entering university is a disturbing trend. There are increasing financial and time pressures on students, and many take on jobs while studying. This undoubtedly has a significant impact on the time they have available for study, and the researcher also believes that the increased emphasis on socialisation, and an increasing level of independence for students would also impact on available time.

As students transition from high school to university, there is a shift from homework to self-study. That said, the responses indicate that students are more likely to do set homework, so it would be wise for teachers to consider ensuring that specific tasks are set and monitored. It may be that students prefer to be more accountable. Teachers also need to consider their students' preference for group work when activities and lessons are planned, as the results indicate that many students prefer this, even saying that it helps them to attain better grades.

More consideration also needs to be given to the incorporation of technology into classes in line with the students' preference for using smartphones for study, and in order to enhance engagement, motivation and participation.

This study has not only focused on students' the study habits, but has also shown some of their preferred learning styles and the preferred time of day for study. To maximise engagement, teachers should consider

these findings, providing teaching styles which parallel students' needs. This may provide an opportunity to encourage students to create new goals, and therefore increase motivation.

There remain areas worthy of further investigation, particularly in relation to why some students chose an English major when they felt they performed better in other areas, and with regard to the decline in study time once they leave in high school. Given the small number of participants in this study the results should be viewed with caution. It would be ideal to repeat this study in the future with a larger sample size and a more extensive data set.

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Appendix A

(English version)

Study Habits Questionnaire

1. What grade are you in?

1st year

2nd year

2. How do you see yourself as a learner?

I'm not good at learning new things

I'm an average learner

I'm a good learner, I like to learn

I'm a very good learner, I love to learn

3. What are your grades like?

Mostly As

Mostly As and Bs

Mostly Bs

Mostly Bs and Cs

Mostly Cs

Cs or less

4. Are you better or worse at studying English than other subjects?

Better at English

Better at other subjects

About the same

5. How do you learn? (more than one answer is ok)

Study during class

Reading the textbook

Revision by myself

Notetaking

DVDs and movies

Talking to the teacher

Cramming

Listening to the radio

Listening to foreign music

Writing letters or email

Memorization

Reading foreign books

Doing assigned homework

Checking dictionaries

Doing extra homework

Studying in the library

Practice speaking skills

Asking the teacher questions

Reading English newspapers/ magazines

Watching English TV programmes

Surfing the Internet

Listening to study CDs

Do practice tests

6. When do you study? (more than one answer is ok)

Early morning

Lunchtime at school

At home before dinner

After watching TV

Only at school after class

At school in between classes

At home after dinner

Very late at night

In the train/bus to and from school

7. How long did you study daily for the university entrance examination?

Less than one hour

1 to 2 hours

3 to 4 hours

More than 5 hours

Other _____

8. How long do you study each day now?

Less than one hour

1 to 2 hours

3 to 4 hours

I only study before exams

Other

9. Do you prefer to study alone, with a study partner or a group?

Alone

With a partner

With a group

10. Please rate each item on how your opinion matches (Likert-type scale)

I study better alone

I study better in groups

I study better during class

I do better in my classes when I work in groups

I do better in my classes when I work alone

Strongly agree/ Agree/ Disagree/ Strongly disagree

11. Are you able to study for at least half an hour without getting up, having a snack, watching TV or touching your phone?

Always

Generally

Hardly ever

Never

12. Do you preview/review for each class everyday?

Always

Generally

Hardly ever

Never

13. Do you start studying for exams at least three days beforehand?

Always

Generally

Hardly ever

Never

14. Can you finish your exams at school within the time given?

Always

Generally

Hardly ever

Never

15. I'd like help from my teachers in learning better study skills?

Yes

No

16. My family gives me financial support for my studies.

Always

Generally

Hardly ever

Never

17. My family gives me emotional support for my studies.

Always

Generally

Hardly ever

Never

18. Do you have a smartphone?

Yes

No

19. Do you use it for studying?

Yes

No

20. If yes, do you like using your smartphone to study?

Love it!

Like it

Don't like it

Hate it!

21. Do you have a quiet and comfortable place to study?

Yes

No

22. Do you regularly attend class?

Always

Generally

Hardly ever

Never

23. Do you always give assignments in on time?

Always

Generally

Hardly ever

Never

Appendix B

(Japanese version)

学習調査

1. 何年生ですか？

1 年生

2 年生

2. 学習者としての自分をどう見ますか？

新しいことを学ぶのは得意ではない。

平均的な学習者である。

良い学習者である～学ぶのが好きである。

大変良い学習者である～学ぶのが大好きである。

3. 学校の成績はどうですか？

ほとんど A

ほとんど A と B

ほとんど B

ほとんど B と C

ほとんど C

C かそれ以下

4. ほかの科目より英語を学ぶのは得意ですか？

英語の方が良い

他の科目の方が良い

同じくらいである

5. どのように英語を勉強しますか？（複数の回答可）

授業中に勉強する

テキストを読む

復習する

ノートを取る

DVD や映画で勉強する

先生と話をする

詰め込みで勉強をする

ラジオを聴く

洋楽を聞く
手紙や e-mail を書く
暗記する
洋書を読む
宿題をする
辞書をひく
課題以外の勉強する
図書館で勉強する
会話の練習をする
先生に質問する
英字新聞を読む
英字雑誌を読む
英語のテレビ番組を見る
インターネットをする
学習者用の CD を聴く
練習問題をする

6. いつ勉強をしますか？（複数の回答可）

早朝
通学中に電車やバスで
学校の昼休み
放課後学校で
学校の業間休み
家で夕食前に
家で夕飯後
テレビを見た後で
夜遅く

7. 入学試験のために一日でどのぐらい勉強をしましたか？

1 時間以下
1 時間 から 2 時間
3 時間から 4 時間
5 時間以上
その他 _____

8. 現在 1 日どのぐらい勉強しますか？

1 時間以下

1 時間から 2 時間

3 時間から 4 時間

試験の前に勉強するだけ

その他 _____

9. 勉強する時に一人で勉強する方がいいか、それとも友人と二人か、友人たちで勉強する方がいいか？

一人で

友人と二人で

友人たちと

10. 文章について自分の意見をチェックしてください。

授業外で一人で勉強した方が良い

授業外でグループで勉強した方が良い

授業中に一人で勉強した方が良い

授業中にグループで勉強した方が良い

授業中に一人で勉強すると理解が深まる

非常に同意できる / 同意できる / 同意できない / まったく同意できない

11. スマホを触ったり、テレビを見たり、お菓子を食べたり、立ち歩いたりせずに少なくとも 30 分連続で勉強をできますか？

できる

ほとんどできる

ほとんどできない

できない

12. 毎日各授業のために予習復習をしますか？

いつも

ほとんど

ほとんどしない

しない

13. 少なくとも 3 日前に試験勉強を始めますか？

いつも

ほとんど

ほとんどしない

しない

14. 学校で決められた時間内に試験を終わらすことができますか？

できる

ほとんどできる

ほとんどできない

できない

15. 勉強のスキルを学ぶために先生たちの助けが欲しい。

はい

いいえ

16. 家族が勉強のため経済的に負担をしてくれますか？

いつもしてくれる

ほとんどしてくれる

ほとんどしてくれない

してくれない

17. 家族が勉強のため精神的な支えをしてくれますか？

いつもしてくれる

ほとんどしてくれる

ほとんどしてくれない

してくれない

18. スマートフォンを持っていますか？

はい

いいえ

19. 勉強のためにスマートフォンを使いますか？

はい

いいえ

20. 持っているなら勉強のために使うのは好きですか？

大好き

好き

好きではない

嫌い

21. 勉強するために静かで居心地が良い場所がありますか？

はい

いいえ

22. 普段から授業に出席しますか？

いつも

ほとんど

ほとんどしない

しない

23. 提出期限まで課題を出しますか？

いつも

ほとんど

ほとんど出さない

出さない

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